CHAPTER III

THE SPANISH CIVIL WAR: MAN AT WAR

See Spain and see the world.
Freedom extends or contracts
in all hearts.

(Rex Warner - The Tourist looks
at Spain. New Writing. 1937 Vol.4)

According to a Spanish proverb history is a common
meadow in which everyone can make hay.

Above two quotations, both contradicting each other,
reveal two different aspects about the war. When one reads
the first, one realises how the Spanish conflict had become
the subject of such international propaganda; that it
represented the thoughts and aspirations of the thirties
generation with regards to war. While the Spanish proverb
reveals how the Spanish Civil War was an appropriate centre
and outlet for the regimes of Hitler and Stalin consolidating
at that time.

This chapter deals with the Spanish Civil War but
narrating its history or proving the truth of historical
texts is not the objective here.

Mostly what is read about this war is written by
Pre-Republican writers or many antifascists. Nevertheless
there are newspaper articles, memoirs, interviews with people,
that reveal either a pro or an anti Franco attitude depending on the side for which they fought or which they supported.

With the help of material of this nature this chapter will present a picture of that generation in Spain that was a victim of the war.

Books on Spanish history that give an account of the war are not full of purple phrases describing or glorifying the war. Right from the start the war was a risk, neither expected nor desired but one which had become inevitable. One cannot say that the conflict simply began in July 1936 with the rising of the Nationalist Generals against the Republican government. That particular event merely signalled the greatest clash in the conflict of forces between Rightists and Leftists, Fascists and Communists which had dominated Spanish history.

This chapter will be divided under the following sections.

Section 3.1 : Historical Background

In this section the historical background of Spain preceding the Spanish Civil War will be examined through books on the Spanish Civil War.

Section 3.2 : The Second Republic

This section will briefly summarise the rise to power and the problems of the Second Republic. Also this section has further sub-sections as:
Section 3.2.1: The Popular Front

In this section is a brief description of the regime of the Popular Front.

Section 3.2.2: Rise of the Communists

This section will have an account of the rising influence of the Communists in the year 1936.

Section 3.2.3: Rise of the Falange

This section will have an account of the rise in influence of the Falange in the year 1936.

Section 3.3: The Outbreak of the War

The final event that sparked off the war in Spain will be described here. This section will also record an interview with a person who took part in the war.

Section 3.4: International Involvement

The issue of international involvement in the Spanish Civil War will be discussed here.

Section 3.5: The International Brigade in Spain

An account of the International Brigade in Spain will be given and its functioning will be described.

Section 3.6: Varied Reactions to the War in Progress

Here by examining the propaganda carried on during the Spanish Civil War, varied reactions to the war in progress will be brought out.
Section 3.7: The Nature of Warfare

An idea of the nature of warfare, the difficulties the volunteers encountered during the battle and how they faced such situations will be described in this section.

Section 3.8: The Withdrawal of the Brigades

This section will describe how Spain announced the withdrawal of the Brigades and the problems of repatriation faced by the volunteers.

Section 3.9: Conclusion

The conclusion will seek to highlight the distinctive nature of this war. It will then proceed to indicate how the poetic expression will be found to differ from the accounts discussed in this chapter.

3.1 Historical Background

It is necessary at this stage before describing the Spanish Civil War to scan the Spanish domestic front and a few events preceding the war that eventually led to the inevitable Spanish Civil War in July 1936.

Spain began the twentieth century with very little industry and an agricultural system which kept almost half of its four-and-a-half million agricultural workers on the edge of starvation. It had an army with one general to every hundred ragged soldiers and a vast surplus of incompetent officers whose only successes consisted of crushing unarmed rural revolts. The navy meanwhile had almost ceased to exist after its defeat in the
Spanish-American war. Corruption, financial scandals and speculations in public life were so common that they aroused little interest.

One third of the government incomes went into the pockets of the tax collectors and were disappeared among the ministers and their subordinates. Very few taxes were imposed on the rich and the large land-owners paid virtually nothing. Thus the tax system was an utter farce.

Then came the three decades of the twentieth century that are marked by the birth and resurgence of the monarchic and Republican forces in Spain as a result of the constitutional crisis.

From books like The Spanish Civil War by Antony Beevor we are able to get the following picture of Spain before the war.

Spain being a non-participant enjoyed a great export boom during the First World War. Vast new areas of land came under cultivation to take advantage of the foreign demand; industries expanded rapidly drawing in manpower from depressed rural areas. Business profits soared high but the prices rose faster than the wages. With the end of the war the export boom slackened, workers were worse off and they became militant. The period from 1918 to 1920 saw uprisings in Andalucia, strife in Barcelona, workers' strikes and a lock-out in Catalan. The Military Juntas of Defence
provoked by these circumstances staged a coup d'état and established the dictatorship of General Prime de Rivera in 1930.

This dictatorship lasted until January 1930. The causes of his immediate success and subsequent failure were many. Firstly people believed that dictatorship was only a temporary phase and would end with the summoning of a 'Constitutional Cortes' which did not happen.

Prime de Rivera was also accepted by the liberal middle class who felt nothing could be worse than the recent years of chaos and bloodshed. Besides he developed Spanish industry and ended the Moroccan War (1911-1929).

But the dictator took no interest in the intellectuals. He would do anything for the masses but educate them. Spain needed radical reforms but problems like that of the Catalan workers remained unsolved. The dictator could govern only by the permission of the two most reactionary forces - the Army and the Church. Also his relation to the King made it impossible for him to summon a 'constituent cortes'. His personal habits were undisciplined. The intellectuals and the liberals soon became hostile towards him. The last two years of his rule were terrible. Liberal journalists, generals, everybody, even the students, could challenge the dictator. Primo de Rivera appealed to
the army to reassure himself of their support which was not forthcoming and he resigned on 28th January 1930.

After the dictator the monarch King Alfonso XIII had to face alone an anti-monarchist feeling that had been growing ever since the Anual catastrophe. (The Anual catastrophe is the disastrous defeat of the Spanish troops by the Moorish rebels at Anual in July 1921 for which most Spaniards blamed Alfonso). Drawing on James Clough's book *The Spanish Fury* (The story of a Civil War) one can enumerate the following reasons for the end of monarchy.

(a) The army resented Alfonso's interference in strategy.
(b) The church condemned his liberalism.
(c) The industrial and commercial magnates feared his arbitrary incursions into public business.

These were the conservative elements and if they regarded their sovereign with mixed feelings then the socialists, liberals, and Catalans had no use for him at all.

3.2 The Second Republic

Municipal elections held on 12th April 1931 in all the chief towns of Spain resulted in an overwhelming majority of republican candidates being elected to the local government boards. Thereupon the Second Republic was proclaimed. Alfonso XIII the last Bourbon king of Spain accepted his fate; in his own car he drove out of Spain to
France (Marseilles); by his own request his obsolete flag served as his shroud in 1941.

The Spaniards were extremely optimistic about their Second Republic which they affectionately called 'La Nina Bonita = the nice little girl'.

This mood lasted just for a month, though the Second Republic lasted until 1936 when the Civil War broke out. Very soon the Republican centre was caught between the forces of traditional Spain, which only regarded their defeat as a temporary setback, and the expectations of a desperately underprivileged mass. The Republic was to be involved in deep conflict over the questions of land reform, the power of the church and the army, and regional devolution.

The Republic had to face the question of church power barely a fortnight after the government had taken office. The forces of 'Eternal Spain' (the trinity of church army and monarchy) had started plotting against the Republic within weeks of Alfonso's departure.

The new constitution guaranteed 'to every worker the necessary conditions for a dignified existence'. It also said that property would be 'the object of expropriation for social utility', but guaranteed compensation. No government could solve the appalling problem of the landless peasants by what amounted to purchasing odd. Strips from land-owners with limited funds available.
The poor were no longer preferred to wait patiently. Also the Spanish working class organizations were greatly affected by events abroad especially in Russia.

Thus all these events that led to political economic instability caused by clashes between leftists and rightists socialists and liberals marked the period of the Second Republic.

The Asturian rising in October 1934 was a dramatic indication of the direction of the events. The Republican Statesman Jose Maria Gil Rebles recognized the urgent needs of his country. In the face of such an anarchic state another general election was held in February 1936 which was won by the Frente Popular, the Popular Front.

3.2.1 The Popular Front

The victory of the Popular Front produced the greatest expectations among the working class supporters of the Left and a corresponding consternation in the Right and Centre.

The Popular Front was made up of various parties namely Socialists, Republican Left, the Republican Union and the Communists.

General Franco chief of staff at the Ministry of War had given an assurance that he would not take part in any plot against the new Republican government. But three
weeks later Franco called the caretaker prime minister Portela Valladares and urged him to declare a 'State of War' and thus prevent at any cost the Popular Front from taking effective power. The prime minister refused, pointing out the dangers of a revolution and stepped down from his post and handed over power to the Socialist leader Manuel Azaña.

The new prime minister tried to maintain law and order; rigid press censorship was introduced; General Franco was sent off to semi-banishment in the Canaries, where he actively conspired against the government. On the 23rd of June General Franco wrote once again to the prime minister of the Republic protesting against the arbitrary dismissal of Right-wing officers in the army which was liable to undermine discipline and would lead to serious doubts and disturbances in the minds of his officers. The prime minister did not reply and Franco made up his mind to start an uprising. The army officers and the Falangists were openly preparing an uprising and negotiating with Mussolini and Hitler for assistance and with the Carlists (the Monarchists) to fix up a date.

Thus the Popular Front was not able to bring any order into social life. Their party alliance seemed to be constitutional just for the purpose of the elections; for the Socialists were busy planning what they would do when the power fell into their hands and the army and the Falangists were busy preparing an uprising.
The following quotation from the Spanish newspaper El País reveals the various reasons for the inevitability of the Spanish Civil War. It says:

It is clear that there appeared other types of social conflicts while the specifically Carlist conflicts receded. The most important were the rise of nationalist sentiments in Catalonia and the Basque countries, the growing opposition of the secular intellectual front to the official status quo and above all the role each time more important played by radical organisations of the working class. It was all derived partly from the laxity and the inconsistency of the economic development of Spain and of the incompetence of its ruling class.

Also later article reveals how the important image was that of Russia where the revolution had destroyed both religion and State, both family and society, both little and big, private and public properties. For the Military conspirators who wanted to put down the Republic the Russian revolution played a significant role.

Now before mentioning the incident immediately responsible for the conflict a brief account must be given about the Falangists and the Communists.

The year 1936 saw the rise of two parties, the Communists and the Falangists from very small beginnings to positions of power and influence in Spain.
3.2.2 Rise of the Communists

The Communists rose to power because of two considerations. Firstly during the months that followed the elections they supported the Popular Front and wished it to develop into the Popular Front government. Secondly they wanted to take advantage of the revolutionary situation to increase their influence and following. The Communists were diplomatic and moderate in their moves. There was a powerful propaganda machine always well supplied with money. There were organisations that provided food and money to political prisoners of any party. They flattered any intellectual, anyone useful to them. But their most characteristic method of adding to their forces was by infiltration into or union with other working class organizations. Behind these communists stood Russia. That Spring, shops were flooded with Spanish translations of Lenin and other writers describing life in the Socialist paradise.

3.2.3 Rise of the Falange

The rise to power of the Falange, while somewhat similar to that of the Communists, was more rapid and more successful. Their leader was Jose Antonio Primo de Rivera (the lawyer son of the former dictator). He was then only deputy to the Cortes. More than half their members were university students and only one in five of the rest came from the working classes.
The Falange's ideology when translated into concrete terms is nothing but "simple orthodox fascism" says General Brenan in his book *The Spanish Labyrinth*. The Falangists differed from the Italian model of fascism in their attitude towards the church. To the Falangists the church was the essence of "Hispanidad" (Spanishness). The ideal Falangist was to be portrayed as a "political warrior jesuit" says Antony Beevor in his book *The Spanish Civil War*.

The Rightists were disillusioned by their defeat in the February 1936 elections. They deserted their leader to join the violent section of monarchists led by Calvo Sotelo or they enrolled in the Falange.

The Falange then grew but since it was secretly organised there was no list of its members or their number. These Falangists believed in terrorism and violence. They treated the parties of the Right, for example the CEDA (Conferaderacion Espanola De Derectas Autonomus) with insults and rotten eggs, broken windows and furniture. The left were beaten or murdered. In Madrid they had their cars of escuadristas armed with machine-guns which went around the streets shooting down whoever opposed them. Judges who condemned fascists to prison, journalists who attacked them in the press were assassinated. But their particular vendetta was against the socialists. All Spring and Summer the streets of Madrid and of other Spanish
cities were disturbed by shooting affrays between the two parties. The object of this was to increase the sense of disorder and confusion to the point when 'the passive classes' would rebel and call for some change of government.

Thus there was a continual turmoil. In every trade there were strikes, high wage demands from workers, compensations for wages earned whilst they were in prison, a financial crisis imminent so that the occurrence of an assassination erupted into a civil war.

3.3 The Outbreak of the War

On the 13th of July 1936 the news became known that Calvo Sotelo (the monarchist member of Parliament) had been assassinated by some socialists disguised as police as a reprisal for the murder of one of their companions by the Falangists a few days earlier. The shock produced by this death served as an advantage and on the 16th July 1936 the army in the Spanish zone in Morocco arose. The government did not act. Soon the military everywhere followed the pattern. On 18th July 1936 military garrisons led by Right-wing officers arose, took over the town hall and where available the radio. They were supported by the Falange and in many cases by the civil guards. Proclamations were read from the balcony of each town hall declaring a state of war; military law was quietly imposed and civil
rights suspended. The army proceeded to apply its powers ruthlessly and brutally committed a number of atrocities. When the proclamations of a state of war was announced in official terms in several places the confused townsfolk thought the military garrison was carrying out the orders of the Madrid government.

In Barcelona the incident that actually sparked off the war as related by a victim from there was on the Sunday (18th/19th July 1936) when he went to the church with his brother. He reached the church to see it burning before his very eyes. He was just a seventeen year old boy, ready to join college. He lost his father who held democratic opinions, as well as his two aunts who were cloistered nuns and was thus forced to take part in the war and fought on France's side. He had no political knowledge with regard to joining any party and his decision to join France was due to what his family suffered at the hands of the Republic. He stated that this was not just true in his case but in the case of many others who were driven by chance to join the parties that they did.4

The general population were unsure as to which party they should join and so often hung back and saw how things were going before committing themselves. In any case there was no way of remaining neutral. There were then three options for any Spaniard.
(a) To escape and join Franco.
(b) To get drafted by the Republic.
(c) To get into exile and if caught death was the ultimate fate.

And each one's decision to join either of the sides had not been a deliberate political choice but resulted from their personal sufferings at the hands of the opposing force.

The early days of fighting were chaotic. Improvisations on both sides were impractical. Field guns were fixed on the rear of lorries to resemble something of a self-propelled artillery; armoured cars were built around trucks; every form of grenade was tried out. It was not until the early days of August that the fronts became recognizable and only at this stage did the realization that Spain faced a civil war, rather than a violently contested coup, penetrate people's minds.

The most emotional issue in any warfare is the atrocities and the most horrific ones often get fixed in one's imagination. During the Spanish Civil War many atrocities were committed but those with a religious significance left a deeper impression on most people's minds, for example the workers killing the priests or the Carlist requetes (Militia) making a Republican lie in the form of a cross before cutting off his limbs while shouting 'Long live Christ the king.'
Such atrocities related by press officers provided sensational news. Initially the correspondents did not get the chance to examine the truth or the background of most incidents. In their panic people often imagined or exaggerated their tales of horror. One such incident goes like this -

The gang of Barcelona workers said to be covered in blood from a massacre on 19th July were, in fact from the abattoirs and had rushed straight out to resist the military rising. 5

What one observes on reading about the atrocities committed is the mutual hatred that was all around. There was an absence of feeling of kinship with opponents. But at the end of the war (as revealed in a personal interview) people went back to start their normal lives once again. No one questioned or spoke to the other regarding their involvement in the war. 6 Thus the vendettas did not continue after the war.

3.4 International Involvement

The hasty impressions by press correspondents affected world opinion, foreign aid, and foreign relations with Spain. This brings us to review how the world outside Spain reacted to the catastrophe. Some countries stuck to the laws of international diplomacy. Others who welcomed the possibilities of experimenting with their new weapons agreed to assist Franco in the war; but mostly all were
Stephen Spender writes in his autobiography *World Within World* about the Austrian reaction when the civil war broke out. Spender was in Vienna in July 1936 when the newspapers reported the beginnings of the Spanish Civil War. He says that to the Austrian socialists the Spanish War was at first more a subject of amazement rather than of hope. At first they followed the struggle with only an academic interest. But within a few weeks Spain had become a symbol of hope for all anti-fascists. It became possible to see the fascist antifascist struggle as a real conflict not just a seizure of power by dictators from weak opponents.

Ralph Fox, a member of the International Brigade, who went as a political commissar (on behalf of the communists) wrote from Albacet on 7th December 1936:

Victory means the end of fascism everywhere, sooner or later, and most likely sooner. 7

This was not just the opinion of Ralph Fox alone but of the members from any nation who volunteered to join the International Brigade. They felt the urgent desire to serve Spain to save the world from fascism.

Here is an advertisement published in a Canadian Newspaper. 3

'Canadian League against war and Fascism
(A national movement for peace and freedom)
"I believe that" War and fascism menace alike the life and liberty of the common people of the whole world. I therefore desire to support the work of the Canadian League against war and fascism.

Name
Address
Occupation - Phone
Organization if any "

Any human being even if he was not a communist, and was totally without military training, felt the need to fight fascism.

The Clarion call for democracy versus fascism had echoed splendidly through Europe and America and the civil war in Spain reached a new intensity.

The recruitment centre at Paris itself was choked with volunteers from Germany, France, Italy, Poland, Mexico, Ireland, Latvia and Yougoslavia. This mixed composition of the International Brigade volunteers meant that not all were idealists. They were adventurers, unemployed men, mercenaries, scientists, intellectuals, writers, poets, communists, sailors or soldiers. Yet the majority of them were idealists.

The story of Esmond Romilly, nephew of Winston Churchill who joined the International Brigade reveals the adventurous spirit, a selfless attitude and a impulse to serve a cause. 2585
Esmond Romily at seventeen years decided to support himself by his own labour. He had no specialized knowledge of any particular profession. He sympathised with the Spanish republicans and the idea of volunteering occurred from the very beginning. His lack of military training did not discourage him. He did not even know how to load a rifle. He was not a communist. And when he decided to go to Spain he told his friends that he was off to work on a Belgian farm. At the Marseilles recruiting office an elementary cross-examination failed to discover his shortcomings. Numerous forms were filled with false information and he found that the lying did not mean much. He reached Albacete as a volunteer of the International Brigade.

The Canadian poet Dorothy Livesay in her book *Right Hand Left Hand*, which documents the thirties, says that although it was illegal for a Canadian to serve in a foreign cause, 1200 young men and some young women managed to get visas to France and from there joined a freedom trek across the Alps. But in Quebec the reverse happened: the Catholic Church called for volunteers to aid Franco and got them.

Foreign aid to the Republican side came through their sympathisers, the volunteers of the International Brigade and the Russian government. Arms and supplies from Russia were generally earmarked for communist units or those
controlled by the communists and military strategy was sometimes enforced by withholding or granting vital items.

Britain and France strictly adhered to their policy of neutrality or non-intervention. The French prime minister Leon Blum, and some of his cabinet were anxious to aid the Spanish government but French Right-wing opinion was hostile and the danger of a national split grew during July. In fact it was not until the bombing of Guernica in April 1937 that the battle for world opinion really changed in the Republic's favour, but by then the Republicans were already losing the war.

It is argued that German and Italian aid to Franco contributed a great deal towards Franco's victory.

In his book The Spanish Civil War Thomas Hugh cites five occasions when the arrival of foreign aid was most crucial. And three out of these were beneficial to Franco.

In the first case it was the supply of transport aircraft by Germany and Italy in July 1936.

Secondly there were the sophisticated weapons sent by Mussolini and Hitler in early 1937.

And thirdly, the most important, if Franco had not exchanged so many mining rights for German arms in the autumn of 1938 he could not have launched the brilliantly successful Catalan Campaign in Christmas of that year.
Thus the occasions were decisive moments and Hitler and Mussolini both found various reasons to continue the war and aid Franco.

3.5 The International Brigade in Spain

The International Brigade served vital purposes in the civil war. Nearly 35,000 foreigners served in the International Brigade during the course of the war. Almost 80 per cent of the volunteers from Great Britain were manual workers who either left their jobs or were unemployed. The base selected for the International Brigade was Albacete. The barracks were in a very bad state in terms of hygiene. The British working class volunteers were unused to foreign food so they suffered from dysentery.

At Albacete the volunteers were given lectures on why they were fighting. They were given uniforms that consisted of either woolly Alpine hats or Khaki berets, ski jerkins, breeches, long thick socks and mostly ill-fitting boots. Some of them were given army surplus uniforms from the First World War; in fact it was rare to find anything that fitted them satisfactorily.

Most of the volunteers were unfit, ignorant of military skills, only knew the simplest military drills — how to form ranks, march and turn. Many of them never handled a rifle until they were on their way to the front, and the few Great War veterans had to show them how to load their obsolete weapons of various types.
But these foreign innocents had one advantage and that was they had with them veterans with a greater knowledge of military methods who knew the life in the trenches and who 'had been through it before'. The Spanish militia faced most of the same disadvantages as the Brigades and it is said that Spain's neutrality in the First World War made the first shock of the battle more traumatic to the Spanish militia.

However innocent they might be or whatever might be the reason for the volunteers going to Spain, one cannot doubt the selfless motive of most of the volunteers of the International Brigade.

In the Battle for Madrid in November 1936 the International Brigade played a vital role in preventing the encirclement of the capital city. The arrival of XI International Brigade had a powerful effect on the population of Madrid. This group was regarded as the best of the Brigade and their disciplined handling of arms along with trench digging had a good effect on the militia defending Madrid. Mention is often made about the determination and suicidal bravery of the XIth International Brigade.

An English Brigadier described the scene of the arrival of the XIth International Brigade as:

It was a brave sight. It had all the glamour and excitement that governments can use to make men forsake their homes and die on foreign soil ... but it was ours! 9
The Xth International Brigade suffered severe losses when forcing the Nationalists to retreat and by the end of November the struggle for Madrid had turned into a normal siege and the actual fighting had died down.

The battle of Jarama in February 1937 and the Guadalajara Offensive in March 1937 resulted in fearful casualties. This often happened because of the deficiencies of the commanders and staff on both sides. The commanders often persisted in carrying out the orders even when the promised aid and tank support failed to arrive on time. Because of the intensity of the fighting, rations did not arrive on time and both the sides were weakened by hunger. There were temporary standstills in the war. At such times the troops, especially the International Brigades, were visited in their trenches by large numbers of foreigners. These included journalists, a few 'war tourists' and politically committed supporters of the Republic. An International Brigade volunteer said some of them visited for 'pseudo-military excitement'. When they visited the front line they would often borrow a rifle or even a machine-gun to fire off a few rounds at the Nationalist lines.

When there was a lack of fighting during the battle of Jarama, the International Brigadiers were visited at the front by diversely famous visitors such as Stephen Spender, Professor J.B.S. Haldane and Errol Flynn.
3.6 Varied Reactions to the War in Progress

The commitment of most of these artists and intellectuals was on the side of the Republic. Hence it will be observed that in the case of the Spanish Civil War mostly what is written is on behalf of the Republic or the losers which is not the case always because history often reflects the viewpoint of the winners.

There was something like a propaganda war during the Spanish Civil War about the war itself. There were censorship and restrictions on anything published in Spain. There were 'propaganda-oriented' briefings from the government press officers. Censorship extended according to the political or commercial prejudices of the editor.

While the Republicans courted the journalists and famous writers and tried to convince the outside world of the justice of its cause, the Church also played a political role. "Leaflets with photo montages of Christ flanked by generals Mola and Franco were issued to the Nationalist troops." 10

There was a propaganda struggle in Britain too. Newspapers like the 'News Chronicle' and 'Manchester Guardian' supported the Republic, 'The Times', and 'Telegraph', remained more or less neutral while the rest supported the Nationalists. Hence the practice of a newspaper sending its reporter or correspondent to the side it supported became
a custom and in most cases the reporter adapted himself to the political party that his paper supported. An exception to this rule was the writer Arthur Koestler who entered Spain as a secret communist agent. Although he represented the left-wing 'News Chronicle', he started with the Nationalists in Seville, but had to escape when he was noticed by a German journalist called Strindborg, who knew he was a communist. Koestler was about to be arrested by the Nationalist press officer and only the pressure from the British and American press saved him from execution.

The actual witnessing of the war affected these writers. For many of them their idealism was undermined by the events they witnessed. Antony Beevor writes:

Simon Weil, who supported the anarchists, was distressed by killings in eastern Spain. She was particularly affected when a fifteen year old Falangist prisoner was captured on the Aragon front and shot after Durutti spent an hour with the boy trying to persuade him to change his politics and giving him until the next day to decide. Anden who had written an enthusiastic description of the social revolution at the end of 1936 returned from Spain after service with an ambulance unit saying little but evidently disillusioned. Stephen Spender shaken by the executions in the International Brigades, left the communist party soon afterwards.11

Spender mentions in his autobiography World Within World how since the International Brigade was an illegal organization the Embassy could not help those Brigadiers who wished to be repatriated, for they had in effect renounced their rights as British citizens.
Spender visited Spain in 1937 as a delegate at the 'Writers Congress' held in Madrid. At that time at a banquet in Valencia he sat next to a correspondent of a Communist newspaper. The young correspondent informed Spender that he had read Spender's article published in the New Statesman, where Spender had drawn attention to the fact that the International Brigade was communist controlled and had argued that things should be made clear to the young volunteers before they joined. The correspondent agreed that the facts Spender had mentioned were all true but yet he felt that Spender should not have written them. He argued that Spender should consider not the facts but the result which might follow from writing them. To quote:

The truth he went on to argue, lay in the cause itself and whatever went to promote it. Apparently, truth, like freedom, lay in the recognition of necessity.12

All writers were not pro-Republican. It is interesting to read the views of some of them who supported Franco and the Nationalists.

Evelyn Waugh having said that he would support Franco if he were a Spaniard then emphasized: 'I am not a Fascist, nor shall I become one unless it were the only alternative to Marxism. It is mischievous to suggest that such a choice is imminent.'13

And Hilaire Belloc, a nationalist supporter, described the struggle as "a trial between Jewish Communism and our traditional Christian civilization."
It will be evident from both these cases that violent anticomunism had led these writers to this position as well as anti-Semitism in the second.

3.7 The Nature of Warfare

Some idea of the nature of the actual fighting can be obtained from descriptions of the Battle of Ebro in July 1938, considered as one of the most decisive battles of the war. Most of the fighting took place around fortified hill tops and the Brigades threw themselves into it time and again for five consecutive days, attacking towards the topmost ridge under paralysing fire.

In the book The International Brigades by Vincent Brome the Battle of Ebro has been described in detail. The author brings out the problems that the men of the Brigade faced on Spanish ground. The account reveals the heroism of the men who fought in such muddle and confusion that existed during the Spanish Civil War. Vincent Brome describes how messages were received in the heat of the battle and what an outdated ring these civil service messages had and how extraordinary they were. One such message by Lewis Clive, an Oxford man and Labour councillor, author and sportsman, goes like this:

Time : 10:15. Your message just received. You seem to visualise the company giving covering fire only, while the message also just received from Battalion gives orders
to advance taking advantage of artillery barrage. Assume the latter to be correct and will look out for opportunity so to advance. Please let me know if I have not understood position correctly. Lewis Clive.

The Brigades revealed a very important message for mixed forces. They came from different nations having different political indoctrinations and training so there were different reactions to on the spot emergencies; and commands would become confused because of language difficulties. The Brigades grappled with these complications and in most cases overcame them. One man in each company usually had a rudimentary knowledge of several languages and could quickly translate commands.

3.3 The Withdrawal of the Brigades

While on the one hand the battle of Ebro was reaching its grimmest hours, on the other the repatriation plans of the 'Non-Internation Committee' were being discussed. The Spaniards basically distrusted foreigners and the members of the Brigade were getting to realise that the future was not too bright for them.

The battle of Ebro was still raging when the news announcing the withdrawal of the International Brigade reached the XVth Brigade. Their last action took place on 22nd September 1938. Their newest and youngest American recruits was killed. Most battalions suffered heavy casualties.
The announcement of the withdrawal was made by the Spanish government in the following way.

The Spanish government wishes to contribute not only in words but also in deeds to the appeasement desired by all, and resolves to dispel all doubts as to the completely national character of the cause for which the Armies of the Republic are fighting. To this end the government has decided upon the immediate and complete withdrawal of all non-Spanish combatants now participating in the struggle in Spain, in the Government's ranks, and it is to be understood that this withdrawal will apply to all foreigners, without distinction as to nationality including those who may have assumed Spanish nationality since 5th July 1936. We are overcome with a feeling of deepest pain at the idea of being separated from the body of brave self-sacrificing men, who with an impulse of generosity that will never be forgotten by the Spanish people, came to our assistance during one of the most critical hours of our history. 15

And on the 17th October 1938, regarded as the 2nd anniversary of the International Brigade in Albacete, the 35th division began its farewell.

On the 15th November 1938 there was a farewell parade for the International Brigades and Negrín the great Republican leader, and La Pasionaria (Dolores Ibarurri) were there to give thanks to the remaining 13,000 men. La Pasionaria's speech was full of praise for the Brigadiers.

"Comrades of the International Brigades!"

La Pasionaria said, "Political reasons, reasons of State, the welfare of that same cause for which you offered your
blood with boundless generosity, are sending you back, some of you to your own countries, and others to forced exile. You can go proudly. You are history. You are legend. You are the heroic example of democracy's solidarity and universality. We shall not forget you, and when the Olive tree of peace puts forth its leaves again, mingled with the laurels of the Spanish Republic's victory - come back!"16

From the speech one can visualise what an emotion filled, moving occasion the farewell must have been.

The selfless attitude with which the volunteers of the Brigade came to aid Spain and how they wished to be of some use to humanity can be observed in a letter by Dr. Norman Bothine of Canada who wrote:

'Madrid's the centre of gravity of the world, and I wouldn't be elsewhere.'

But the end when it came for the Brigades was a sad one. The International Brigadiers became victims of repatriation.

Repatriation was not satisfactory. Germans and Italians could not go back. Russia offered refuge only to top Republicans like La Pasionaria and some 200 members of the Brigade. The Polish government announced their decision to deprive the volunteers of their citizenship.

Of the British who came home many changed their political views as they were disillusioned by the communist party and settled down to various occupations.
Tom Wintringham, one of the chief instructors for those early units of the International Brigade, returned to England sick with typhoid while his wife retired to an old vicarage. Wintringham wrote chapter after chapter of the book *English Captain*. He became an instructor in the British Home Guard but never took part in the Second World War.

Esmond Romilly became a fighter pilot and was killed in the 'Battle of Britain'. (Second World War).

The Spanish war ended in Franco's victory. One can call it a most passionately fought war with no humanitarian feeling on either side.

One cannot assess the contribution of foreign intervention in the Spanish Civil War whether in terms of economic or military and for its effectiveness depended on the time of its arrival. But the intervening powers acquired considerable experience in the art of war especially Germany, Italy and Russia.

Even the British learnt something from the Spanish Civil War. The effects of the air raids in Barcelona titled as a 'Study in Human Vivection' appeared in the London News. After a few months of the end of war in Spain, Fred Copeman, an ex-commander of the British battalion of the International Brigade, lectured to the Royal family at Windsor on air-raid precautions.
Due to the medical assistance rendered to the Republic there was a great deal of medical advancement in the field of surgery and general therapy. The most outstanding were the developments in the technique of blood transfusion inspired by the Canadian doctor Norman Bethune.

There is plenty of information and opinions available on Spain after the war, on Franco's rule and the attitude of the present generation. But to think of the Spanish Civil War on remembers C.D. Lewis's expression in his poem 'The Nabara'.

Freedom was more than a word
more than the bare coinage
of Politicians who hiding behind
the skirts of peace
They had defiled gave up that
country to rack and carnage,
For whom, indelibly stamped
with history's contempt,
Remains but to haunt the
blackened shell of their policies.

3.9 Conclusion

At the end of this chapter one can realise how our thinking on the Spanish Civil War has largely been moulded by leftist writing, while the chapter reveals, how strong is the entrenchment of rightist forces from a period going well back before the Spanish Civil War.
The record of an interview reveals how most of the civilians were drawn to join either of the sides not by a deliberate choice but as a result of their personal sufferings, while there were on the other hand undoubtedly men who were strongly committed to their parties.

From the background of the volunteers who joined the International Brigade, and the descriptions of war it is clear how the volunteers were unprepared for the type of war in Spain. For example we note the chaotic conditions under which they functioned in the midst of a battle and the lack of military training among the volunteers themselves as well as the Spanish people. This shows that the volunteers were mainly aware only of the Spanish cause which in turn threatened humanity all over, and this was the only thought uppermost in their minds when they went to Spain.

These volunteers who faced such innumerable problems in a foreign land were further hurt by the news of the withdrawal of troops while the battle of Ebro was still raging. The Brigadiers became victims of repatriation. Many were disillusioned regarding the political views they had held, and went to settle down in various other occupations.

Apart from all this the materials used in this chapter reveal that for the first time we read history from the side of the defeated. History generally reflects the viewpoint of
the victors but the predominance given to the vanquished is significantly more in books that recount the Spanish Civil War.

While this chapter gives an insight with the various aspects of the Spanish Civil War, it will be observed in the next chapter how the poetry tends to give the impression that the whole population is fighting against the tyranny called fascism. Especially the poems by the British poets reveal their single minded devotion to the cause of Spain, and an awareness of the fate of humanity.

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End Notes:


2. ibid, p.31.


5. Beevor, op.cit, p.70.

6. Personal interview, op.cit.


11. *ibid*, p.177.


15. *ibid*, p.262, 263.


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